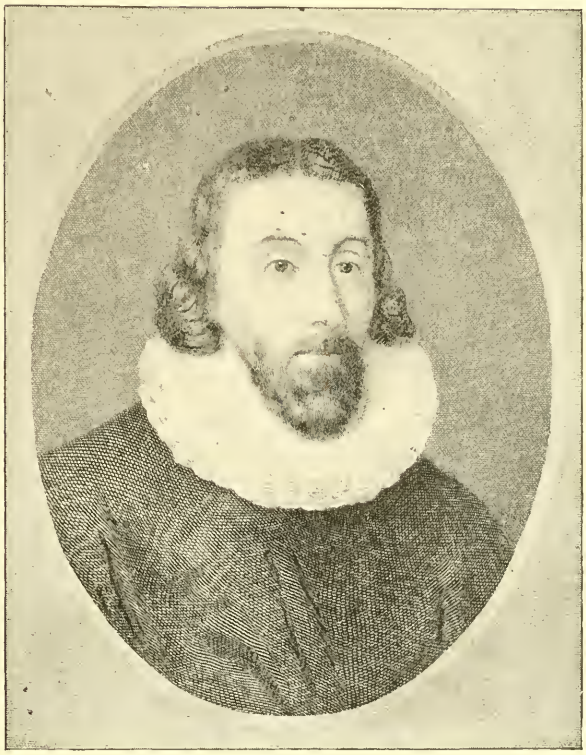
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New England Magazine. May, 1892.



GOVERNOR WINTHROP'S FARM.

A CHAPTER OF OLD BEDFORD HISTORY.

By Abram English Brown.

IT was an early custom in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay to reward the labors of leading men by grants of the common lands. When John Winthrop, the "father of the colony" and "founder of Boston," arrived with his associates at Salem, there were thousands of acres extending inland from tide water, of which but little was known, save that they were inhabited by Indians and wild beasts. Samoset's "Welcome, Englishmen," confirmed by Massasoit, was the greeting which encouraged the Pilgrims to penetrate the wilderness about Plymouth, within sound of their own guns, which they had early planted on the brow of the hill. A company, in which were unprincipled men, had begun the settlement of Wassagusset, (Weymouth), and pushed inland far enough to arouse the animosity of the natives by injudicious treatment. The few settlers at Saugus (Lynn) and Mishawum (Charlestown) had been too much occupied in their struggling settlements to peer far into the wilderness beyond them. John Endicott and his Puritan followers had scarcely time to establish homes for themselves at Naumkeag (Salem), when the "great immigration" took place, and

John Winthrop came as Governor, with Thomas Dudley as the Deputy. Five days after the arrival of these eminent men at Salem, the former records in his diary: "Thursday 17 (June) We went to Mattachusetts to find a place for our sitting down."

This exploring journey between Salem and Charlestown was made on foot. While they doubtless kept within sight of the shore, they must have had an eye to the vast forests which covered the plains and capped the hills toward the setting sun. As landed estates were the basis of wealth and influence in the mother country, it is reasonable to suppose, and by subsequent actions of these men conclude, that they were not so oblivious to self-interest as to pass these unexplored tracts without thinking of the possible wealth that lay beyond them.

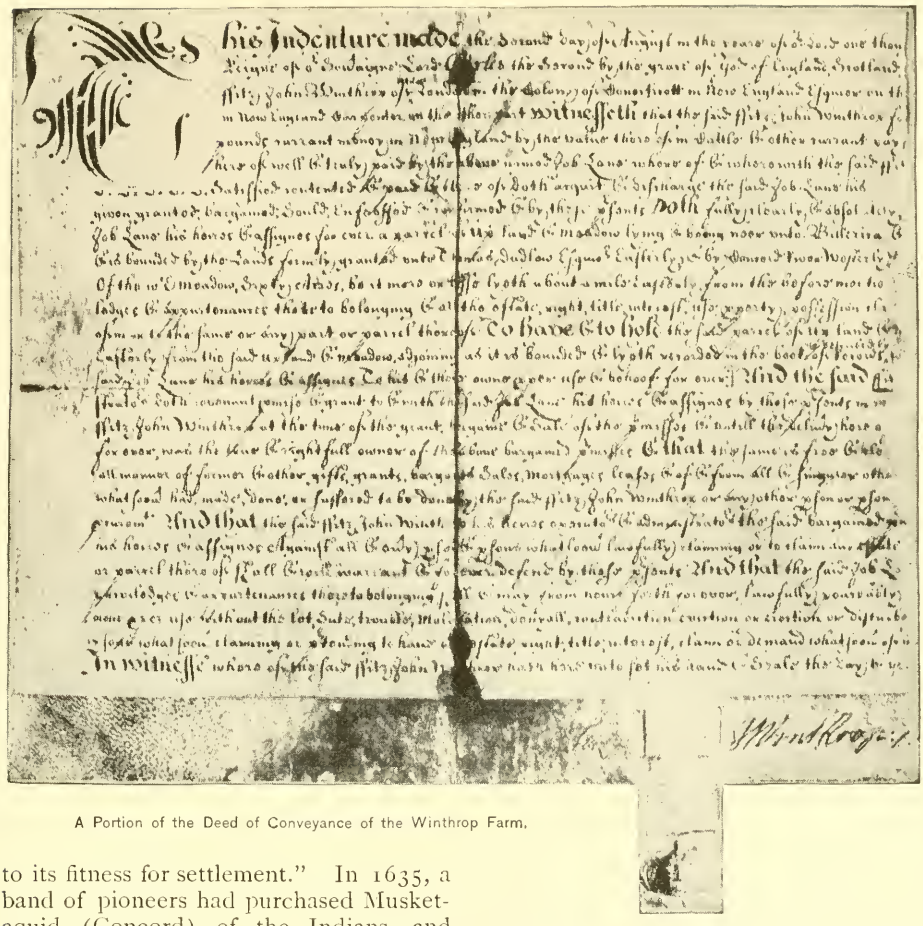
The years that immediately followed the temporary settlement at Charlestown, of Winthrop and his associates, and their permanent location at "Trimontaine" (Boston), were full of hard work and anxiety for all, but especially trying for the one who had been intrusted with the charter, during the voyage across the Atlantic. It is difficult at this day to conceive of the burdens that were cheerfully borne by John Winthrop during the formative period of the colony. At first there was so much unanimity among the people that the governor was elected by a "show of hands." But this harmony did not continue long; differences of opinion arose among the freemen and found expression at the elections, and the office of chief executive alternated between Winthrop and Dudley, with an occasional change from both. John Winthrop was so thoroughly determined to establish a permanent colony and an independent church where they could "enjoy God and Jesus Christ" (as he wrote to his wife), that he graciously stepped from the leadership to minor positions, according to the caprices of the freemen, and labored always with an eye single to the prosperity of the enterprise.



The Two Brothers.

When the more important matters of government had been adjusted, and new settlements had been commenced beyond the limits of the Bay, the General Court took measures to explore the land in the vicinity of the rivers and determine "as

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A Portion of the Deed of Conveyance of the Winthrop Farm.

to its fitness for settlement." In 1635, a band of pioneers had purchased Musketaquid (Concord) of the Indians, and begun a settlement there. In the following year, the records show that adventurers were looking toward the bordering lands of "Shawe Shin," "to see whether or not it may not be a fitt place for a plantacon." The open lands in the vicinity of the rivers and the adjacent highlands were looked upon as particularly favorable locations for settlement, and that land lying between the Concord and Shawshine Rivers seems to have been sought for by more than one.

It appears that the court was desirous of rewarding Winthrop and his associate, Thomas Dudley, for their long and faithful services; and in November, 1637, a grant of one thousand acres was made to each, "where it may not piudice any plantation granted nor any plantation to be granted w^th^ out limiting to time of impv^t^."

During the early years of the colony, all was not harmony in domestic circles. A severe controversy sprang up between Governor Winthrop and Deputy-Governor Dudley. The impulsive nature of the latter had been severely aroused by the former's decision to re-locate his house; personal matters were allowed to influence public acts, and this family quarrel (the first recorded in Massachusetts) caused a good deal of trouble for others.

These eminent men were more intimately associated than through their official positions, — their children had united the families by marriage. But the "root of bitterness" was not cast aside until they located their farms, when the effect of their unfriendly relations upon the community seemed to dawn more clearly upon them. The record in



Job Lane's House.

Winthrop's Journal, under date of April 24, 1638, is as follows:

"The governour and deputy went to Concord to view some land for farms, and, going down the river about four miles, they made choice of a place for one thousand acres for each of them. They offered each other the first choice, but because the deputy's was first granted, and himself had store of land already, the governour yielded him the choice. So, at the place where the deputy's land was to begin, there were two great stones, which they called the Two Brothers, in remembrance that they were brothers by their children's marriage, and did so brotherly agree, and for that a little creek near those stones was to part their lands."

The "two great stones," which are represented in the illustration, stand not only as the boundary of their farms, but are a monument of the reconciliation there reached between the founder of Massachusetts and of Boston, and his associate in power, as well as between brothers through the marriage of children.

In point of fruitful suggestion for the artist, the locating of these farms comes close upon the landing at Plymouth. The eminent governor, dressed in short clothes, cloak, and ruff, with but one companion, and he an unfriendly brother, travels out on foot through the wilderness to the young settlement at Concord; and there on the bank of the river destined to be the scene of an opening revolution, the two embark in a boat — doubtless an Indian canoe. They paddle along with the sluggish current, rounding the many curves, until within sight of two boulders, which must have been lodged there during the glacial period, they moor their bark, select their farms, and become friends and brothers indeed.

Four months after this memorable visit, the court added two hundred acres to the governor's farm, and still later an addition of sixty acres was made. The governor, in common with others, had a preference for low grass land, and this final enlargement was to consist of a tract of meadow to the eastward of his first selection.



Road dividing the Winthrop Farm.

Whoever paddles up and down the Concord River, where its waters touch the western border of the town of Bedford, cannot fail to see the ground on which Winthrop stood, in very much the same condition in which the governor left it two centuries and a half ago. The "Two

Brothers" still stand out alone and above all other stones, as conspicuous as is the record of the founder of Massachusetts Bay Colony, among the records of his successors in office. New England presents few memorials, unadorned by the hand of man, that can be compared with these boulders, as regards the events which they commemorate.

The southern boundary of Winthrop's farm was "Concord old line," one side of the "six mile square" which Rev. Peter Bulkley and his associates purchased of the Indians. The northern boundary was the "little creek" running from inland to the river.



The First Meeting House.

It is not probable that Winthrop ever again visited his farm, although he enjoyed the satisfaction of the possession. The duties incident upon the growth of the rapidly increasing company of immigrants, during the remaining eleven years of his life, absorbed all of his time and strength. The farm remained in its natural condition, and in the family possession, fifteen years after the death of the eminent governor, when it was sold by his eldest son, Fitz John, the governor of Connecticut, to Job Lane of Malden. The deed of conveyance is still in possession of the descendants of the purchaser. It is a well-executed instrument, written on vellum, and reads as follows:

"This Indenture made the Second Day of August in the Year of our Lord one thousand Six Hundred Sixty and Four, in the Sixteenth Year of the Reigne of our Sovereign Lord Charles the Second by the Grace of God over England, Scotland, France, and Ireland King and defender of the faith to wit. Between Fitz John Winthrop of New London, in the colony of Connecticut in New England, Esquire, on the one part and Job Lane of Malden in the County of Middlesex in New England, builder, on the other part — witnesseth that the said Fitz John Winthrop for and in consideration of the sum of two hundred and thirty-two pounds, currant money in New England, by the value thereof in cattle and other currant pay of New England, to him in hand before the sealing and delivery thereof well and truly paid by the abovenamed, Job Lane, whereof and wherewith the said Fitz John Winthrop doth acknowledge himself to be fully satisfied and contented, and will be thus," etc.

The seal, a very unique appendage, bears the impression of the family signet.



Fitch Tavern.

Job Lane paid for the farm by building a house for Fitz John Winthrop, at New London, Connecticut. He erected a dwelling upon the eastern side of the

farm, and this is thought to be now standing and occupied as a family residence. It was used as a garrison during the time of King Philip's war. During later Indian troubles, it was the fort from which Mary, daughter of Col. John Lane, fired at and killed a lurking red man. She had vainly tried to convince the guard of the approaching enemy, and having taken matters into her own hands, she soon proved the truth of her impression.

The Winthrop Farm remained intact until the death of Job Lane, in 1697, when it was divided among his heirs. It was then surveyed for the first time and found to contain fifteen hundred acres.



Mill on the Shawshine.



Alice Stearns.

FROM AN OLD PAINTING.

The governor, having no means of measurement, made sure to include within his bounds the full amount granted to him. As the deed above quoted, in part, included twelve hundred and sixty acres, "more or less," the heirs of Job Lane were the first to realize the full extent of the farm. The oldest son received one half — a double portion — according to the laws then in force, and the remaining half was divided between the heirs of two deceased daughters of Job Lane. On the former half the Lanes have lived and flourished, and the eighth generation now occupies a portion. One fourth of the farm — a daughter's share — was occupied by Samuel Fitch, grandson of the purchaser, and was the birthplace of several sons who became eminent men in the colony.

The Winthrop Farm became a part of the town of Bedford through the act of incorporation of September, 1729, but as the creek referred to was taken as the northern boundary of the new town, only one of the boulders was included. An addition was made in 1766, which brought the dividing line farther to the northward

and secured to the town the enduring companion.

The first road laid out from Billerica to Concord, in 1660, crossed the Winthrop farm. That was soon followed by "trodden paths," and latterly the "country roads" and public highways, as the convenience of the early settlers demanded. In the closing years of the eighteenth century, the people cut a way through the forest, bridged Concord River, and made one of the most attractive highways of that locality. The gracefully



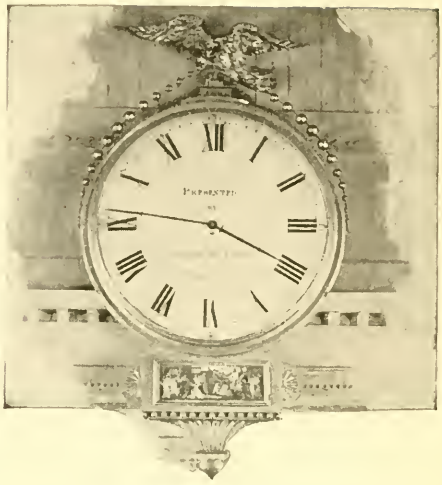
Chestnut Avenue, Pickman House.

curving roads across the farm, suggest the paths naturally marked out by the early settlers in going from one house to another. Much produce of these well-tilled acres is now marketed in the great city founded by John Winthrop.

On the extreme southeastern border of the Winthrop farm is a mammoth oak tree, which must have burst the shell of the acorn about the time of the memorable visit of the governor. Many of its companions were sacrificed by the pioneers, to build the strong frame of the first meeting-house in the town of Bedford; and the worm-eaten timbers may be seen in the second house of worship. Who it was that dropped his axe at the imploring word, "Woodman, spare that tree," we cannot tell; but robbed of all its companions it stands a living monument of many transactions since John Winthrop selected his farm. In the vicinity of this tree, the "minute men" of the town were marshalled in the morning twilight of April 19, 1775; and at the tavern near by, kept by Jeremiah Fitch, the young soldiers who had left their homes at the midnight alarm were given refreshment, before starting for Concord. The words of their brave captain Jonathan Willson, on leaving the tavern, were, "This is a cold breakfast, boys, but we'll give the British a hot dinner; we'll have every dog of them before night." Encouraged by the hopeful words of their captain, they hastened on to the protection of the mother town.

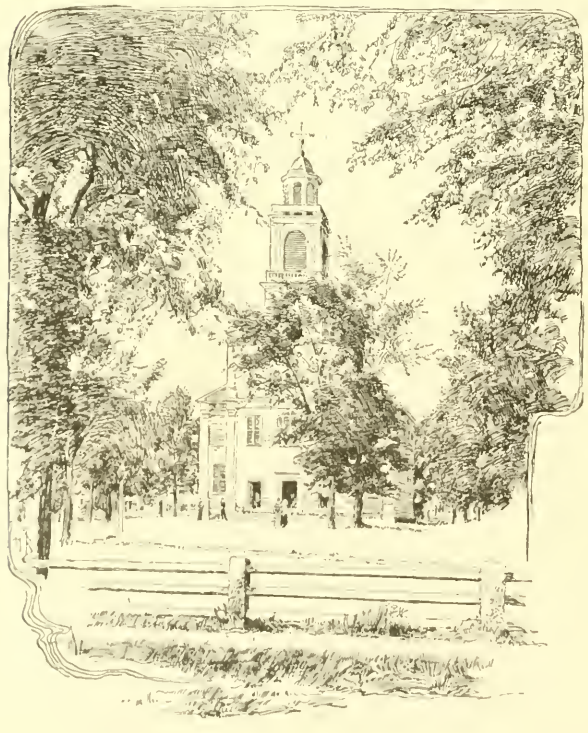
This company and that of the militia of the town numbered seventy-seven men, who were in the engagement at the old North Bridge, and were foremost in the

chase across the "Great Fields" to intercept the retreating enemy at Merriam's Corner. Captain Willson was killed by a British bullet, while cheering on his men near the Lincoln Line. Job Lane, a private of the company, was wounded in the same engagement. The only monument ever erected to the memory of this gallant man is an ancient slate stone, which stands at the head of the grave where his family and comrades laid him on the day following his death. It is in the Old Burial Ground of the town. The motto in Latin on this rude monument is in sentiment the same as that on the flag or banner which was carried at the head of the Bedford company. This flag was carried by Nathaniel Page.



Old Clock, Bedford Church.

As the Minute Men had been hastily organized, their officers were not commissioned as were those in command of the Company of Militia; they had no regularly adopted standard, and Nathaniel Page took the old flag that had been carried by his ancestors in former wars. After the scenes of that memorable day it was returned to the Page house, and there kept until the 19th of April, 1875, when it was carried by a delegation of Bedford citizens in the procession at the centennial celebration at Concord. Ten years later, Oct. 19, 1885 (the one hundred and fourth anniversary of the surrender of Cornwallis), it was presented by Capt. Cyrus Page to the town of Bedford. It was thus brought to the attention of the Massachusetts Historical Society, and the following report was made:

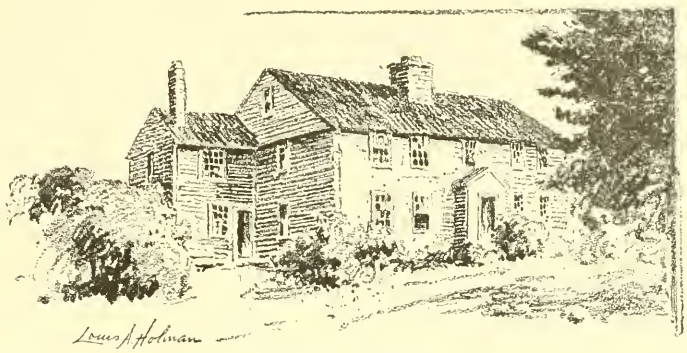


Bedford Church

"It was originally designed in England, in 1660–70, for the three-county troops of Massachusetts, and became one of the accepted standards of the organized militia of this state, and as such it was used by the Bedford company."

Mr. Appleton said that, in his opinion, "this flag far exceeds in historic value the famed flag of Eutaw and Pulaski's banner, and, in fact, is the most precious memorial of its kind we have any knowledge of." It is highly prized by the descendants of those who fought beneath its folds in the opening scene of the Revolution.

After the death of Captain Willson, the command of the company fell to Lieut. Edward Stearns, his brother-in-law, Lieutenant Stearns lived on the border of the Winthrop and Dudley Farms. His estate was included in that portion of



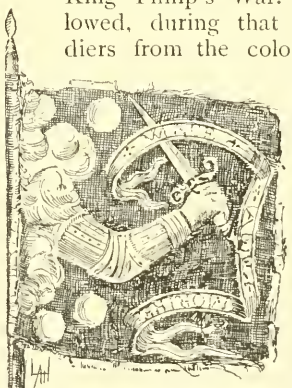
The Bacon Homestead.

Billerica that was set off to Bedford in 1766.

When the report of the movements of the British soldiers reached the Stearns home, the father and oldest son — Solomon — made haste to the place of rendezvous at the centre, and there joined the company. During their absence at Concord, other members of the family were busy in the preparation of supplies for the army. Three daughters, Rachel, Susanna, and Alice, aged sixteen, thirteen, and eleven respectively, were occupied in making cartridges. A portrait of the youngest of this trio of patriots is extant. It was painted in 1801, and our illustration is a copy of it.

The site of the home of Lieutenant Stearns is that of the residence recently purchased by Dudley L. Pickman of Boston. Mr. Pickman is a lineal descendant of Lieutenant-Governor Dudley, who, with Governor Winthrop, received the early grants of this territory. Chestnut Avenue, leading to the residence and historic grounds, makes a most beautiful modern connection of these farms of colonial history.

Besides the Winthrop Farm, there was included in the town of Bedford at the time of the incorporation, other lands that represent very early grants; and the grantees were men of prominence in the colony. There was a farm of five hundred acres granted to Capt. Daniel Gookin, a valuable servant of the colony and a co-worker with the Apostle Eliot. One of the same extent granted to the Rev. Joseph Mitchell, a minister of Cambridge, was purchased by Michael Bacon in July, 1682, for two hundred pounds. It was occupied by the Bacon family for several generations. The purchaser was of the third generation in this country, and was an occupant of the land, probably by lease, before he bought it of the widow of the grantee. He had a mill on Shawshine River, which crossed the farm, before King Philip's War. He was allowed, during that war, two soldiers from the colony's forces to protect his mill.



Old Flag carried at Concord, 1775.

It is recorded that the mill was burnt during the Indian outbreak. If so, it was soon rebuilt, and there has been a mill for the accommodation of the farmers ever since. The mill, nestling in the midst of the foliage and reflected in the shining water, makes a pleasing combination of what is rare both in history and in nature.

It was the land in this vicinity, that has been already referred to as having been explored in 1636, with an eye to settlement. Not far from the mill was the Shawshine House, alluded to in a re-



Rev. Samuel Stearns.

port of 1642. It was first occupied as a trading post with the Indians.

The house at the Bacon homestead is one of the most ancient dwellings of the town, seven generations of the family having been born here. Jonathan Bacon, a member of the fourth generation, was a leader in the work of incorporating the town. He was a prominent citizen of Billerica, appointed by the selectmen of that town in 1699, "to sell victuals and drink." He was in the Indian war in 1706, was a representative to the General Court in 1726, and in 1729 was recorded as a "principal inhabitanc," and ordered by the Colonial Court to assemble the people and organize the town of Bedford.

His nearest neighbor, half a mile away, was Nathaniel Page, who settled here in 1687. The Page house is another of the historic dwellings of the town. Eight generations of the family and name have been identified with it, among them some brave warriors and prominent men of the town. A beautiful house in the colonial style of architecture has been recently built by the family, but the old mansion is still preserved.

Among other private residences of the early days is that known as the Stearns Mansion. It was built, soon after the Revolution, for the third minister, Rev. Joseph Penniman. He was a very eccentric man. His peculiarities are perpetuated by various family traditions, and are also shown in the epitaphs on stones at the graves of two children in the burial ground where Capt. Jonathan Willson is buried:

"Dec. 22, 1790. Hannah, daughter of Rev. Joseph Penniman and Hannah, his wife, aged 18 yrs, 4 mos, 11 days.

Ah! now, no notice do you give
Where you are and how you live!
What! are you then bound by solemn fate,
To keep the secret of your state?
The alarming voice you will hear,
When Christ, the Judge, shall appear.
Hannah! from the dark lonely vault,
Certainly, soon and suddenly you'll come,
When Jesus shall claim the treasure from the tomb."

"August 21, 1778. Molly aged 3 yrs, 6 mos, and 3 days.

Ah! dear Polly, must your tender parents mourn
Their heavy loss, and bathe with tears your urn,
Since now no more to us you must return!"

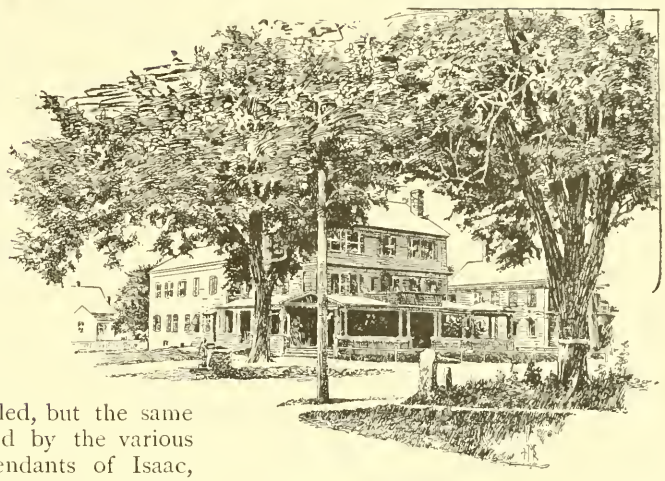


Hannah Reed.

FROM A SILHOUETTE OF 1820.

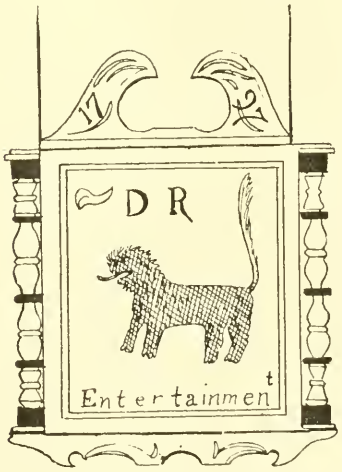
When the peculiarities of Rev. Mr. Penniman became unbearable, his pastor-

ate was brought to an end. He was succeeded by Rev. Samuel Stearns, who purchased the house of the retiring pastor and there established his home. Rev. Samuel Stearns was of the sixth generation in the country, and from the same family as Lieutenant Edward Stearns, before referred to. The name has been variously spelled, but the same coat of arms is claimed by the various branches of the descendants of Isaac, who came to this country in 1630, probably with Gov. John Winthrop.



Bedford House.

The fourth minister of the town began his work in 1796, and remained in the pastoral office nearly forty years. He came to the town when the ecclesiastical and municipal affairs were in a somewhat chaotic state, and he was helpful in the introduction of reforms that have been continued to this day. The Stearns Homestead was the birthplace of Rev. Samuel H. Stearns, one of the pastors of the Old South Church in Boston, Rev. William A. Stearns, D. D., LL. D., late president of Amherst College, Rev. Jonathan F. Stearns, D. D., late pastor at Newark, N. J., Josiah A. Stearns, A. M., Ph.D., a noted schoolmaster of Boston for forty years; and Rev. Eben S. Stearns, D. D., LL. D., chancellor of the State University of Nashville, Tenn. All of these, with the exception of the last, were baptized in the first meeting house of the town. The second son, William Augustus, was baptized on the day of his birth, a cold Sabbath in March, 1805. The custom of performing this ceremony on the Sabbath immediately following the birth was rigidly adhered to by the pastor of the town.



Sign of David Reed's Tavern.

The bellows-top chaise in which Rev. Mr. Stearns made his parochial calls is still preserved at the old homestead.

The house of worship known as the Old Parish Meeting House, was erected in 1816. It has stood three-quarters of a century, with few changes externally, but the inside has been refitted at different times in accord with the demands of the progressive age. The clock in the meeting house was given at the time of dedication, by Jeremiah Fitch, a native of the town, and a Boston merchant for whom Bedford Street in that city was named. The clock was made during the last war with England, and was naturally mounted with patriotic emblems. Here are represented the American eagle and the chain of states then comprising the Union. The town of Bedford has not been so fortunate as many towns in receiving gifts; among those who have

been recorded as public benefactors is Hannah Reed. She gave a piece of land for a "public promenade or walk." Through the purchase of land beyond it for a Union schoolhouse, the full benefit of the gift is being realized by the youth of the town.

The town has always been well supplied with inns. The Shawshine House was a tavern at the time of the incorporation, kept by Benjamin Danforth, who was succeeded by Capt. John Webber, who came to Bedford about 1760. He was from Medford, and he became the founder of a large and influential family. Of the twelve children born at the old tavern, eleven survived their mother, who died at the age of thirty-eight years, and the aggregate age of the eleven was seven hundred and eighty-one years, making an average of seventy-one years. The eight sons lived to the average age of about seventy-six years.

The Webber Cradle, brought with the immigrant to this country, has been used by the family in Bedford since 1690, and is a relic of interest.

A tavern established by David Reed about 1790 was a noted hostelry during the years of stage coaches. The old sign is still in existence; and the house, in which great questions were discussed, is now the beautiful residence of Elihu G. Loomis, a Boston lawyer. The old tavern at the centre of the town has been recently improved, supplied with the modern conveniences and comforts, and is a pleasant retreat for weary denizens of Boston. They find in old Bedford a town which has abolished the sale of intoxicating liquors, and has an enviable reputation for morality, and which is as healthful and beautiful to-day as it was when Winthrop and Dudley paddled down the river to locate their farms.



The Winthrop Oak.

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